

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 SAJ-01 ACDA-19 EB-11 AID-20 SAM-01

OMB-01 SAB-01 DRC-01 /165 W
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R 221809Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8960

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO

CINCUSNAVEUR

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 03680

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, UK, EG, SO

SUBJECT: PRESS STORY CONCERNING SUEZ CANAL CLEARANCE AND
SOVIET INTEREST IN IT

1. FOLLOWING ARTICLE BY DEFENSE CORRESPONDENT HENRY
STANHOPE APPEARED IN THE TIMES MARCH 22, HEADLINED
"ROYAL NAVY SENDS SHIPS FOR CLEARING OF SUEZ CANAL AS
US ADMIRAL SAYS REOPENING WILL HELP RUSSIANS":

"THREE ROYAL NAVY MINESWEEPERS AND A SUPPORT SHIP
SAILED FOR THE MIDDLE EAST YESTERDAY TO BE READY TO HELP
IN CLEARING THE SUEZ CANAL.

"THE MINESWEEPERS WERE THE BOSSINGTON AND MAXTON
AND THE WORLD'S FIRST GLASS-REINFORCED PLASTIC MINE
COUNTER-MEASURE VESSEL, THE WILTON, WHICH WAS COMPLETED
LAST YEAR.

"ON BOARD THE SUPPORT SHIP, THE 1,275-TON ABDIEL, IS
A FLEET CLEARANCE DIVING TEAM WHICH WOULD PLAY A PRO-
MINENT PART IN ANY CLEARANCE OPERATION.

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"THE FOUR SHIPS WILL BE RESUPPLIED AT GIBRALTAR AND THEN SAIL ON TOWARDS THE CANAL, ARRIVING AT PORT SAID ON APRIL 6.

"UNDER THE PROBABLE PATTERN OF OPERATIONS, THE MINESWEEPERS WOULD LOCATE THE MINES AND OTHER ORDNANCE IN THE CANAL. THE FLEET CLEARANCE DIVING TEAM WOULD THEN EXAMINE THE 'FIND' AND DECIDE WHETHER IT SHOULD BE EXPLODED ON THE SPOT OR BROUGHT TO THE SURFACE AND REMOVED FROM THE AREA.

"ALL LARGER TYPES OF EXPLOSIVE WOULD PROBABLY BE DETONATED ELSEWHERE, BECAUSE OF EGYPTIAN FEARS OF DAMAGING THE BED OF THE CANAL.

"SO FAR NO OFFICIAL EGYPTIAN REQUEST FOR HELP HAS BEEN RECEIVED BY THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, ALTHOUGH THREE NAVAL OFFICERS HAVE MADE A PRELIMINARY REPORT AFTER VISITING THE CANAL AT THE INVITATION OF THE EGYPTIAN AUTHORITIES. BUT THE NAVY HAS THOUGHT IT ADVISABLE TO SEND SHIPS TO THE AREA IN CASE A REQUEST IS MADE DURING THE NEXT FORTNIGHT.

"IF THE NAVY IS INVITED TO TAKE PART, IT WILL WORK ALONGSIDE THE UNITED STATES NAVY, WHICH IS PREPARING TO CLEAR MINEFIELDS AT THE CANAL APPROACHES WITH THE HELP OF HELICOPTERS.

"THIS WAS THE METHOD USED TO CLEAR THE MINES FROM HAIPHONG HARBOUR IN NORTH VIETNAM, AND THE OFFICER WHO HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO THE SUEZ OPERATION IS REAR ADMIRAL BRIAN MCCAULEY, WHO ALSO COMMANDED THE VIETNAM CLEARANCE WORK.

"ABOUT 12 HELICOPTERS WILL BE FLOWN OUT IN C5 GALAXY TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT, AND THE CLEARANCE OPERATION WILL BE MOUNTED FROM THE ASSAULT SHIP IWO JIMA, WHICH WILL BE ANCHORED OFF PORT SAID. THE IWO JIMA IS ALREADY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN.

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"AS PART OF AN ELABORATE SUEZ OPERATION WHICH, ACCORDING TO ONE ESTIMATE, MIGHT COST THE PENTAGON ABOUT 15 MILLION POUNDS, THE AMERICANS HAVE ALSO OFFERED TO SEND EXPLOSIVES EXPERTS TO TRAIN THE EGYPTIANS TO GET RID OF THE OTHER ORDNANCE -- APART FROM THE MINES -- THEMSELVES.

"THERE ARE DOUBTS AMONG HIGH-RANKING AMERICAN OF-

FICERS ABOUT THE REOPENING OF THE CANAL. ONE, ADMIRAL WORTH BAGLEY, SAID THIS WEEK THAT IT WOULD GIVE THE SOVIET NAVY THE SAME KIND OF ADVANTAGES THAT BAHRAIN AND DIEGO GARCIA PROVIDED FOR THE UNITED STATES NAVY.

"ADMIRAL BAGLEY IS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, UNITED STATES

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NAVAL FORCES, EUROPE, WHOSE HEADQUARTERS IS IN LONDON.

"SOVIET SHIPS FROM THE PACIFIC FLEET NOW HAD TO MAKE A 9,000 MILE VOYAGE FROM VLADIVOSTOK TO THE GULF OF ADEN WHERE SO MANY OF THEIR INDIAN OCEAN PATROLS ARE CARRIED OUT. TO REACH THE SAME AREA SHIPS FROM THEIR BLACK SEA FLEET WOULD HAVE TO SAIL 11,000 MILES ROUND THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE.

"THE DISTANCE FROM THE BLACK SEA PORTS TO THE GULF VIA THE SUEZ CANAL WAS ONLY 2,200 MILES, ADMIRAL BAGLEY SAID IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE TIMES.

"THE RUSSIANS WERE 'WORKING STRENUOUSLY' AT A

BASING CONCEPT WHICH WOULD GIVE THEM ACCESSIBILITY TO A NUMBER OF POINTS. APART FROM THE STRINO OF IPRTS ALREADY USED ON THE NORTHAFRICAN LIJORAL, THEY WERE NOW CALLING IN AT THE SOMALI NAVAL BASE AT BERBERA, ADEN IN SOUTH YEMEN AND UMM QASR IN IRAQ. THEY HAD JUST VISITED PORT LOUIS IN MAURITIUS FOR THE SECOND TIME IN TWO MONTHS, AND ON THE WEST COAST OF AFRICA HAD CALLED AT FERNANDO POO, ISND CONWRY, #THE CAPITAL OF GUINEA." UNCLASSIFIED

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2. COMMENT: WE UNDERSTAND ARTICLE'S EXCERPT ON IMPORTANCE OF CANAL TO SOVIET NAVY IS BASED ON ADMIRAL BAGLEY'S INTERVIEW WITH TIMES CORRESPONDENCE STAMLOPE

MARCH 14. STAMLOPE USED ONLY A PORTION OF ADMIRAL BAGLEY'S COMMENTS, WHICH IN FULLER AND MORE ACCURATE VERSION APPEARED IN DECEMBER US NEWS AND WORLD REPORT. ALSO, FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE HAS POINTED OUT TO US OTHER IMPORTANT INACCURACY IN ARTICLE, SINCE OFFICIAL EGYPTIAN REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE WAS RECEIVED BY BRITISH SOME TIME AGO, AS ADDRESSEES WELL AWARE.

SOHM

NOTE BY OC/T: #AS RECEIVED. WILL BE SERVICED UPON REQUEST.

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